

Profile of the Educational System of South Africa 2006



For the purposes of evaluating South African
students for study in the United States

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Background to South Africa's Educational System in 2006

South Africa today is a multicultural democracy of 43.8 million people, located at the southern tip of Africa. Until 1994, the apartheid ideology of separation of the races meant that any people of color were afforded inferior educational opportunities due to the disproportionately high public expenditure on services and facilities for the minority white population. Education was often a flashpoint for many protests by the disadvantaged population under apartheid. In particular, the compulsory teaching of Afrikaans, the language of the Afrikaners who held the majority in parliament in this period, was vociferously rejected by generations of secondary students.

At the tertiary level, universities varied according to their racial status. In addition, Technikons and colleges offered vocational training, also on a strict racially segregated basis that, due to disparities in resource distribution and also the curricula offered, tended to reinforce the race and class differences under apartheid.

Since 1994, the African National Congress-led government has done a great deal to amalgamate the various disparate administrative bodies overseeing education at every level and to improve the quality of education for previously disadvantaged individuals (PDI's). Under a unified national department of education, the government is also in the process of merging the 21 universities and 15 technikons into 23 non-racial, more equitably resourced institutions (see list below). The college sector, which includes teacher training institutions and other vocational schools, has also undergone major restructuring.

The challenges facing the South African educational system are several, including the percentage of school aged children who still do not attend school beyond the primary level (currently 87 percent attend at the secondary level and only 20 percent at the tertiary level), and the threat that HIV/AIDS poses to the infrastructure supporting education as the disease takes administrators, teachers, and parents – most in their prime years – in increasing number.

The portion of the population -- black and white – who benefit from private secondary schooling, however, generally are excellently prepared for university study in the United States. And while at this point in history public schools vary greatly in their resources and rigor, it must be stated that the public school student who performs well (with all or nearly all A's) in the standardized national school leaving examination (the matriculation exam) should be considered a strong academic candidate for university study.

The Structure of South Africa's Educational System

The New National Qualifications Framework

Formal education in South Africa is categorised according to three levels: General Education and Training (GET, Reception year through 9), Further Education and Training (FET, grades 10-12), and Higher Education (HE). The HE band consists of a range of degrees, diplomas and certificates up to and including postdoctoral degrees. These levels are integrated within the National Qualifications Framework (NQF) provided by the South African Qualifications Authority (SAQA) Act, 1995 (Act 58 of 1995).

Students who would be qualified to study at the undergraduate level in the US are those who have completed the FET level of study at a secondary or post-secondary academic institution (referred to as high school or college), with an endorsement on their Senior Certificate from the Matriculation Board.

Students who complete tertiary study in South Africa would be variously qualified to study at the graduate level in the United States. Evaluation for such study would require detailed scrutiny of diplomas, degrees, and certificates awarded. Please see the resources list below for points of contact within the South African educational system to assist in this regard.

The Senior Certificate and Evaluation for University Admission:

Each South African student receives, in late December to mid January following his or her Matriculation Examinations, a report showing the subjects that student was tested in, the range of points into which each test score fell, and a corresponding letter symbol awarded for each subject. The scores will yield a total of points dependent upon whether the subjects were taken on the Higher Grade or Standard Grade level. The student's total points comprise the results upon which local universities evaluate him or her for admission. An annotation accompanying the points would state one of the following:

- **Pass** (the student has successfully completed high school, but did not perform well enough to apply to a South African academic university – though this student may be eligible for study at a university of technology).
- **Pass, with Endorsement** (the student has attained the minimum basis for application to academic university study in South Africa).
- **Pass with Exemption** (this refers to adequate performance on a provincial or other exam considered equivalent to the national exam. It is equal to a Pass with Endorsement).
- **Pass with Endorsement and Distinction(s)** (the student has performed at a high level, gaining a distinction for each A awarded, whether at SG or HG level).

Outline of South African Schooling:

Academic Calendar: From late January through to early December

School Holidays: Four term schools: One three week holiday mid-winter (June/July), and two one-week long holidays in April and September, in addition to the roughly six weeks off over the summer (December/January). Three term schools: One month off in April/May and August/September, with half-term breaks in March and June and October, as well as the six weeks off over the summer.

Organization: Centrally organized through the Ministry of Education, but policy is implemented through the nine provincial administrations.

Subject Choices are made by the student at the end of grade 9 if the student decides to go beyond the GET phase. With the new OBE (outcomes based education) approach introduced in the past few years, the choice subjects might include such subjects as tourism, business economics, accounting, as well as maths, science or biology, English, Afrikaans or another national language (required), geography, history, art, and various other foreign languages. Students will follow at least six and up to eight of these subjects for the remainder of their secondary schooling. At the end of grade 12, they must write examinations for six subjects, though they may opt for more. Generally the top six marks are used to calculate the score for the Senior Certificate.

Assessment for University Admission: The externally set and moderated matriculation examination, administered at the end of the secondary period (FET), is the sole tool of assessment of academic performance for university entrance. Marks from grades 9-12 are not considered in the scores noted on the Senior Certificate. However, the grade 11 end of year report is often used as a provisional gauge of academic ability, to be confirmed by the matric exam marks reported in late December).

Marking: Rigor varies from school to school. Many courses are also offered on a higher grade (HG) or standard grade (SG) level within the same school, with students in HG courses grappling with more difficult material than those in the same subject on the SG level. It is thus more difficult to obtain an A at the HG, but that A is worth more points on the matriculation examination report.

Generally, the scale runs as follows at the secondary level:

80–100% = A

70-79% = B

60-69% = C

50-59% = D

40-49% = E

33-39% = F

Public Accredited Universities, granting bachelor's degrees, postgraduate diplomas, master's and doctoral degrees:

University of Cape Town, www.uct.ac.za

University of Fort Hare, www.ufh.ac.za

University of the Free State, <http://www.uovs.ac.za> (Reorganized in January 2004 via incorporation of Vista University (Bloemfontein campus) and the Faculty of Dentistry of the University of Stellenbosch).

University of Kwa-Zulu Natal, www.ukzn.ac.za (Established January 2004 by merger of the University of Durban Westville and the University of Natal).

University of Limpopo, www.unorth.ac.za (Established January 2005 by merger of the University of the North and Medunsa, or the Medical University of South Africa).

North West University, www.puk.ac.za (Established January 2004 by merger of the University of the North West, the University of Potchefstroom, and Vista University (Sebokeng campus)).

University of Pretoria, www.up.ac.za (Reorganized in January 2004 via incorporation of Vista University (Mamelodi campus)).

Rhodes University, www.ru.ac.za/academic

University of Stellenbosch, www.sun.ac.za

University of the Western Cape, www.uwc.ac.za

University of the Witwatersrand, www.wits.ac.za

Comprehensive Institutions, granting both technical/vocational and academic degrees:

Nelson Mandela Metropolitan University, www.nmmu.ac.za/default.asp?bhcp=1
(Established in January 2005 via merger of the University of Port Elizabeth and Vista University (Port Elizabeth campus)).

University of Johannesburg, www.uj.ac.za (Established in January 2005 via merger of Rand Afrikaans University and Technikon Witwatersrand).

University of South Africa, www.unisa.ac.za (Reorganised in January 2004 via merger with Technikon South African and Vista University's distance education campus or VUDEC).

University of Venda for Science and Technology, www.univen.ac.za

Walter Sisulu University for Technology and Science, www.wsu.ac.za
(Established July 2005 via merger of Border Technikon, Eastern Cape Technikon, and the University of Transkei).

University of Zululand, www.uzulu.ac.za/HomePage1.aspx

Universities of Technology, formerly technikons granting technical diplomas and certificates, now awarding degrees, in some cases through the doctoral level:

Cape Peninsula University of Technology, www.cput.ac.za (Established in January 2005 via merger of Cape Technikon and Peninsula Technikon).

Central University of Technology, Free State, www.cut.ac.za (Formerly, the Technikon Free State).

Durban Institute of Technology, www.dit.ac.za (Established in April 2002 via merger of M L Sultan Technikon and Technikon Natal).

Mangosuthu Technikon, www.mantec.ac.za

Tshwane University of Technology, www.tut.ac.za/tut_web (Established in January 2004 via merger of Pretoria Technikon, Technikon Northern Gauteng, and Technikon North West).

Vaal University of Technology <http://www.vut.ac.za/metadot/index.pl> (Formerly the Vaal Triangle Technikon).

Teacher Training Colleges

More than 50 Teacher Training Colleges that existed in South Africa, under the auspices of the nine provincial departments of education, have been merged or integrated into university programs. As several of these former institutions are not easily located via the internet, it is perhaps most productive to contact the Education USA advisor in the country who can make local inquiries at the time based on the specific name of the institution in question to find contact details.

Further Education and Training Institutions (Vocational)

As these are still listed under the nine provincial government departments of education, there is no one list available, and as many are due to change names and merge, it is best to contact the provincial departments for the historical and latest name of any particular institution. For example, to contact the Western Cape Education Department, go to:
http://wced.wcape.gov.za/planning&devel/planning/fet/fet_col.html

An attempt to collate all FET institutions on one site was begun in 2003 (www.sacolleges.co.za), however it is not yet comprehensive.

Resources for Information on South African Educational System and Credentials

Higher Education of South Africa: <http://www.hesa.ac.za/>

Council on Higher Education: www.che.ac.za

South African Qualifications Authority: www.saga.org.za

National Qualifications Framework: www.nqf.org.za

Umalusi: www.umalusi.org.za

Umalusi is the quality assurer in the general and further education and training bands of the national qualifications framework (NQF).

South African Department of Education: www.education.gov.za

Minister: Ms. Naledi Pandor

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South African Matriculation Board: www.sauvca.org.za/mb

The International Education Association of South Africa
(IEASA): www.studysa.co.za

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